

THE CRISIS OF FREEDOM.

REMARKS

ON THE DUTY WHICH ALL

CHRISTIAN MEN AND GOOD CITIZENS

OWE TO THEIR COUNTRY IN THE

PRESENT STATE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

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Slavery in the U.S. - Controversial Literature, 1854

NOTE.---By the advice and at the solicitation of many persons belonging to other congregations, as well as my own, I submit for publication, the following fragment of a Lecture delivered before a united meeting in the First Church of Nashua, Sabbath evening, June 18th, on the occasion of reviewing the Reports from the thirty-four Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in Hillsborough County as presented in their Annual Conference, the previous week at Manchester. The great question as to the predominance of Freedom or Slavery in this country properly came up for review on that occasion only because the present state of public affairs has made it inseparable from a true "Report on the state of religion" even in the Churches of New Hampshire.

DANIEL MARCH.

Nashua, June 21, 1854.

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REMARKS.

The year through which we are passing proves thus far and promises still to be one of the greatest and of the most awful interest to our country and to the world ; to the years of the century which remain to be fulfilled, and to the ages of the future which roll onward, burdened with the destiny of nations and of millions yet unborn unto the disclosures and decisions of the all-judging day. The star of empire in many a land is veiled in dim eclipse. There is already distress and perplexity in the courts of kings and in the hovels of the poor,—great wrath hovering over many nations and “men’s hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” All signs and omens of the future indicate to the principalities and powers of oppression and wrong, that for them at least the day of vengeance is at hand, whether or not the millions of the poor and needy shall receive deliverance from the right arm of the Almighty. The apparent repose of the present can be nothing else than the awful hush of the elements the moment before they sweep over the earth in wrathful and desolating storm. And it would seem certain that the desolation must come wheth-

er or not the Spirit of truth and power shall evoke from the chaos which revolution has made the new creation of order and peace and the beauty of holiness.

It has been our favored lot as a nation hitherto to stand at a safe distance from the earthquake of revolution by which the thrones of the old world have been shaken and the storm of war which has fertilized many fields with human blood and filled millions of hearts with sorrow. But the indications of the present hour are numerous and fearfully clear that our turn may soon come to feel the shock of the commotions with which the powers of the earth are shaken. Our relations with other nations are daily becoming more complicated, and our public affairs at home have already assumed an aspect fitted to fill every earnest and thoughtful citizen with alarm. The old world, sick unto death and racked with the throes of mortal disease, vomits continually upon our shores the elements of pestilence and superstition and war which are fast consuming her own life.— And as if it were not enough that Europe pours a perpetual stream of corruption into the strong current of our national life, the wall of separation by which the swarming myriads of China and Japan have for centuries been kept within their ancient boundaries is already well nigh broken down. And when that is fully effected those populous regions will send forth a tide of emigration across the broad Pacific, numerous as

“the pitchy cloud
Of locusts, warping on the eastern wind
That o’er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung
Like Night, and darkened all the land of Nile.”

And that wave of Asiatic emigration meeting the living tide ever surging up from the Atlantic coast, will

hasten the gathering of the forces and swell their accumulation in the great "Valley of Decision." And thus the history of the passing year on the other side of the globe will do much towards the eventual decision of the question, whether, when the fairest and richest portions of our own broad domain have been submerged under a three-fold deluge of Heathenism, Romanism and infidelity, a pure christianity in this land, as well as among the Alps, will not have to bless God for the strength of the hills and flee unto mountain tops for a refuge.

But this is not all nor by any means the worst that we have to fear. At the very time when we need all our strength and vigilance to counteract the elements of disorder and degradation flowing in upon us from external sources in mountainous overwhelming, a still greater cause of alarm and dismay proclaims itself from the place where should be the very hiding of our power. Incendiary parricides kindle the torches of constitutional conflagration in the capitol of the nation, and with suicidal madness expose themselves and the ark of our liberties to certain destruction. It is as if the eagle of our national banner were on fire in his eyry and the appointed guardians of his safety were fanning the flame. The taunt of the foreign tyrant, that "the home of the free is the land of slaves," is accepted for the literal truth by the highest act of legislative power, and the consummation is celebrated by the jubilant thunders of a hundred cannon on Capitol Hill. "The northern iron and the steel" *has* been broken and the granite of the hills where Freedom grew to her strong manhood, has been

made as the clay, and she has bitter occasion to cry reproachfully unto her own beloved North, "wherefore is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt *thou* be altogether unto me as a liar and as waters that fail!"

I should utterly fail of the duty which I have undertaken on this occasion, if I did not assure you that the earnest and thoughtful christian men with whom I joined in conference the past week, are beginning at last to look upon this one subject of greatest national interest with deep concern. They are not looking on with indifference, nor with divided opinions, while the temple of Freedom shakes under the assaults of insidious and of open foes, and the main pillars of its strength are fast falling to decay. It is fast becoming an accepted article of faith among all the most devout and intelligent ministers and members of our churches, that our country, by the recent acts of Congress, and by the declared purpose for still further action on the subject of slavery, has been brought to a crisis more fearful than that which tried the souls of our fathers, and by manfully meeting which in their united strength they won for us the priceless inheritance of our liberty. And why should we not all so believe and square our conduct by the demands of our faith! In the days of our fathers the enemy to be feared was on the other side of the sea; now the foes of Freedom are they of her own household. Then the provocation to resistance was an act of injustice, by submitting to which they did not become participators in its criminality; now the great national wrong against which we are called upon to contend cannot be

suffered to go on unchecked, without making us sharers in its wickedness. Then the question at issue could be more easily weighed in its various bearings and consequences, and the course of action was proportionally clear; now the vital interests of right and wrong, freedom and slavery, have become so involved with each other that parricides assume the name of patriots and the selfish schemes of politicians and demagogues are made to pass for pure democracy and the rights of man. Our fathers could easily relieve themselves from all doubt and perplexity in answering subtle casuists and sophistical partizans by rushing at once to arms and subjecting their destiny to the bloody arbitration of battle. With us the resort to arms is scarcely to be thought of, even as an ultimate necessity, and yet the contest for the correction of the moral sentiments of men, and for strengthening the infirm purposes for the right and the true, is one that requires a greater degree of fortitude, endurance and persevering effort than it does to march to the embattled field and to die unflinching amid the roar of cannon and "the rush of fierce thousands in their joyous ire." And if we compare the danger, the extent of the woeful and ruinous consequences certain to follow if the present course of things is suffered to go on unchecked, with all that our fathers could foresee as the result of foreign oppression, ours is incomparably the greater and more alarming crisis. The history of the world in their time had not disclosed in any thing like as clear a light as it has since, the value of free governments, their inestimable worth in ennobling the human race and in preparing for the universal and in-

dividual emancipation of mankind from every yoke. They could not know the infinite preciousness of the prize for which they contended. The history of the world for the last half century has been teaching us that lesson more clearly than it could be learned from the records of all the centuries that went before. We can see with awful distinctness what it is which must be lost with the loss of the true, essential idea of human liberty. We can see with alarming certainty how directly at war with that idea is the whole spirit and power of American Slavery. We must be blind if we do not know better than John Wesley himself, the meaning of his own words, when he said a hundred years ago—"Slavery is the sum of all villanies." We have more occasion to shudder, in view of the judgment of heaven impending over so great an enormity than had Thomas Jefferson, when he said—"as I know what slavery is, and as I believe that God is just, I tremble for my country." Slavery began in rapine and murder. It is maintained by violence and wrong. The land where it exists as a permanent institution must reek to heaven with every moral abomination. It does not improve by age. Its utter evil can be counteracted only in proportion as its real nature is destroyed. The spirit of the late crowning act of our Congress for the propagation of this infernal system over large areas of territory, polluted as yet only with here and there a clandestine step of the foul monster, the perfidious measures by which that enactment was secured, prove that there are no depths of iniquity to which slavery in its own proper nature will not descend for the accomplishment of its purposes.

And it is this great wrong—this “sum of all villanies”—this heaven-daring iniquity, which has been advancing of late with fearfully rapid strides to the attainment of a complete dominion over this wide land consecrated to Freedom, to Truth and to God, by the prayers and sufferings of our fathers, and baptised in the fountain of their tears and their blood. Already Slavery lays her iron finger upon the key of every government office in the nation, and no man can take it from her and force an entrance unless he first bow down in worship of the gods which she sets up. Slavery commands, and every cannon in our navy is ready to belch forth its sulphurous thunders in approval and in execution of her proud behests. Slavery cries for help in hounding down the panting fugitive from her bonds, and every sword and musket of our standing army, and of our citizen soldiery too, threaten death to him who would obey God rather than man, by delivering him that hath no helper from the hand of the spoiler. Slavery issues her mandates from the capital of the nation, and the lightning lends wings to the message by which the chief magistrate of the land strengthens the faltering kidnapper with the promise of limitless aid, and thus urges him on to the capture of his human prey.—Slavery enters the capital city of our free New England, and for seven days subjects a hundred and fifty thousand citizens to martial law that she may receive no hindrance from an outraged and impulsive humanity while she proceeds securely in the reclamation of a single fugitive from the house of bondage. Slavery, in her pride of power and place, spurns the three-fold ran-

som that is offered for the deliverance of the captive, that she may have the fiendish and revengeful satisfaction of brandishing her whips and chains under the shadow of the "cradle of liberty," and of setting her foot in scorn on the necks of millions of freemen in their own North. Slavery enthrones her dominant power in our free halls of justice, and repels even the peaceful ministers of God at the point of the bayonet from entering to look in silent and sorrowing sympathy upon the face of one in bonds as if bound with him.—Slavery with her hounding assassins assails the brave and generous advocate of the oppressed, and beats him down with blow upon blow in the open street. Demons, in *their* desperation, can be satisfied with revenge without victory : Slavery demands and secures both. Herself the incarnation of violence and the foe of mankind, she claims protection from the awful majesty of law ; and the indignant citizen who lifts his hand against that claim must be denounced as an enemy of the public peace. Freemen, working-men, merchantmen, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the ambassadors of heaven's peace, and the guardians of the public welfare, must walk the streets of their once free city with a sorrow and an indignation to which no language can give utterance as they see the court house garrisoned night and day by the armed and alien mercenaries of slavery. They must hear the scream of the fife and the roll of the drum proclaiming their bastardy in descent from patriots who defied the troops of the foreign tyrant in the same streets. They must see, till they grow familiar with the sight, the parading of ball-charged

muskets before their own doors, and finally grape and canister feeding the cannon's mouth for their terror, and, if need be, for their destruction. They must see "the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not," and flaunting the banners of a worse than heathen triumph before the temples of Jehovah, while from a hundred voices and the bowed heads of a hundred thousand worshippers, the appeal by prayer and supplication is made unto the Lord of Hosts for peaceful deliverance from the shame and the woe and the wrong. All this must be borne, for Slavery commands, and she is conqueror. Like the all-pitiless demon that she is, the worst relic of heathenism, the impersonation of the fell spirit which has filled the earth with violence from before the flood, she would now, to gain her cruel and selfish purposes, burn the charter of human Freedom, blot out the light of a free and pure christianity on these Western shores, and then, glorying in the wreck she had made, she would send to the despots of the old world the exulting message—

"Shout, Tyranny, shout,
Through your dungeons and palaces—" Freedom is o'er!"
If there lingers one spark of her light, tread it out,
And return to your empire of darkness once more."

And Slavery in still another respect is true to the precedents of despots and conquerors of every age, in remunerating the cost of her triumphs with the spoil of the conquered. She lays her hand on the national treasury, which has been gorged to repletion by taxes imposed on the free and industrious North, and thus pays the cost of arms and soldiery with which to enforce the execution of her own law in the face of those to whom it is, and ought to be, an abomination. Slavery wrests

three-fourths of forty millions from the hard hands of laboring freemen to provide herself with troops and hounds for hunting down and exterminating a few hundreds of Red-men in the swamps and everglades of Florida. Slavery infuses the love of carnage and conquest into the heart of this great nation, whose essential mission is one of peace. She sends forth thousands of our strong and impetuous youth to sweep the plains of Mexico with the iron tempest of war, and then brings home the few who survive the fire of fever and of battle to flaunt the laurels of the bloody field as their sufficient recommendation to places of honor and power under the reign of peace. She demands that the most miserable subaltern in her conquering armies shall be received as a pensioned patriot or shall hold his petty post under government when her conquests have been gained, and that her heroes shall leap from the saddle of the war-horse into the halls of legislation or the executive mansion, there the more fully to glut their passions and to complete the designs that sent them forth to guilty war. Slavery in the day of her weakness secures compromises with Freedom for her protection, and in the day of her strength breaks them without deigning to apologise for the perfidy. Slavery, when outnumbered in the national councils, maintains that "the proper business of government is to protect the minority."—When herself the majority by aid from traitors to Freedom, she reverses her judgment and declares that minorities have no rights, denounces their patriotic efforts to check her indecent haste in the work of ruin as "factious," and accords them no protection. Exulting

in anticipation of a universal triumph, Slavery already proclaims that the islands of the sea are waiting for her law, and that the whole Western continent shall soon be given to her for a possession; and that then again the broad Atlantic shall become a highway over which the slave-ship under her own flag shall pass unmolested, and thus every petty chieftain in Africa shall be incited to the work of rapine and midnight murder, that the barracoons of the coast may be full of captives, that the reeking slave-ship may never want for its living cargo, and that human bodies and souls may be always cheap in the shambles of the South.

And as if all this unutterable horror were not enough, Slavery lays her hand on the word of God, and appeals alike to the law of Moses and the precepts of Jesus, to sanction her "sum of all villainies," and baptise her devil's-gospel with the name of christian. Not only would she annihilate the essential rights of millions of men, and make them as brutes to be bought and sold for gain and at will—she would do it in the name of God and for the greater good of mankind. She would denounce as impertinent and blasphemous, any appeal to the judgments of the Almighty to check her demoniac zeal in strengthening her bands, and extending her territory, and perpetuating her dominion.

Such, my brethren, is the way in which, for the two weeks past, I have been hearing hundreds of the most earnest, devout and intelligent ministers and members of our churches, talk about American Slavery, using that word to designate not only the system under which millions of bondmen groan in hopeless servitude, but

also the designs, the motives and the conduct of all, whether of the North or of the South, who strengthen the power and perpetuate the existence of the one great national shame and wrong. And christian men say such things of Slavery more in sorrow than in anger—not with affected warmth, not in passion, not simply when gathered in excited and tumultuous assemblies. They speak of such things to God as well as to man; alone, as well as in the solemn convocation. The place of secret prayer and the daily altar of numberless households bear witness to the depth and earnestness of the feeling with which christian men regard the greatness and the imminency of the danger now threatening the dearest rights of man, and the most cherished hopes for the speedy redemption of the human race. If the sigh, which is pent up in many a christian patriot's heart could find utterance in words, we should often hear the exclamation—"Oh! my country, my country! my heart bleeds for thee. How art thou beset on every side, yet but half conscious of thy peril! With what unnatural madness are thine own children covering thee with shame and draining thy life blood by wound upon wound! Oh! Liberty, Justice, Truth, must the desert, the wilderness, and the mountains forever be your habitation on the earth? Must Freedom again and again be driven from her hiding place, and the barren waste which her industry has made to blossom as the rose be overrun by the minions of despotism, and polluted by the abominations of slavery? Must the ark of human liberty be but as the life-boat putting forth upon the wild billows to save a wrecking crew, yet over-

laden by numbers, or pierced from beneath by a traitor's hand, and destroying with its own wreck the deliverer of the needy with those whom he perilled his life to save? Must christianity herself, again and again be cradled in storms, and nursed in battle, and baptised in her own blood? and is it thus only that the great Captain of salvation can redeem unto himself the sacramental host of His own elect?"

And who shall say that in entertaining such questions with deep and solemn earnestness at the present crisis, there is too great sorrow and alarm? If ever there has been, or can be, a time when the deep religious sentiment of all free christian men in our land should be stirred to its utmost depths, with fear and anxiety for the safety of all that we hold most dear on earth, that time is *now*. And unless good men and strong men consent to hold all the prejudices and preferences of former parties in subordination to the demands of this one great interest, and act together with persevering and martyr-like fidelity, the time for effective moral action will be past, and an appeal to the bloody arbitration of the sword will be the only alternative of passive subjection to slaveocratic power.

We give our money and we offer our prayer for the conversion of heathen on the other side of the globe; and shall we silently suffer ourselves to be plundered of millions every year, in the form of indirect taxation, for the support of a system, which, carried out in its legitimate tendencies, would establish heathenism upon our own soil, and put out the light of hope and of liberty for all the nations? All christendom thrills with

exultation at the deliverance from the dungeons of the Grand Duke of Tuscany of two prisoners who had committed no other crime than that of reading and teaching others to read the gospel of the Son of God. And we think we do well to pray in plain words for the destruction of a despotism by which such enormities are committed. And shall we be indifferent to the fact that in a large portion of our country, dungeons and death await the man who dares to enter the lowly cabin of the unpaid, unpitied poor, and to teach them to read the words of that Savior who came to preach the gospel of glad tidings especially to them, and to break every yoke? Are we at liberty, either as patriots or as christians, to have *different* opinions on this one great and fearful concern? Shall this great wickedness, with all its consequences, be framed into a law, and stretch out its iron arm through every branch of our Judiciary system, and override all State legislation, and take precedence of all municipal ordinances in every town and city, bond and free, in the land, and yet we hold our peace, and justify our silence with the plea of him who pays the assassin, and whispers when the crime is committed,—“Thou canst not say I did it?”

No, no! The free men, the christian men of our land, who love peace and liberty, and who hate quarrel and oppression, have done *that* long enough. And the only gleam of light breaking upon the darkening prospects of our country, comes from the hope that now, when brought to the very verge of despair, and seeing the great gulf of irretrievable ruin and national infamy open before them, all good men and true men will at last de-

plore the folly of their suicidal divisions, and will stand, and act, and pray, and *vote* together, and for the right. The time has surely come in this enlightened land, when the bare profession of faith in Christ as the great Emancipator of human bodies and souls from every species of bondage, should be a sufficient guaranty to the world, that he who so professes, will, always, and loudly, and effectively, bear his testimony against this great wrong, this most transcendent crime against humanity and against God in whose image man is made. The christian citizen should feel that he has entered into solemn and irreversible covenant with the God of the oppressed and the Redeemer of the poor and needy, no longer by his suffrage or his silence "to help the wicked" who are already too strong in their iniquity, but to help the poor, and to strengthen the feeble, and lift up them that are cast down. And it must be acknowledged with shame, as a sad evidence of the perversion of christian sentiment upon this subject, which of itself is clear as the noonday light, that it *needs* to be declared again and again, that such is the solemn and imperative duty of every professor of the religion of Jesus, resulting directly from the very nature of that voluntary profession of his, and the knowledge which he must have of the present state of affairs in our country.

And the duty of every intelligent, right minded citizen in this respect, is equally clear. Whoever loves his country, and desires the perpetuity of her most sacred institutions, must not hold himself guiltless in giving a single suffrage for, or in neglecting to give his suffrage against, the election of any man to the national coun-

cils, who will not employ all the power that the position puts in his hands for undoing the wrong that Slavery has done, and for disarming her of the power to do it again. In our political organizations, the name of *party* is no more to be uttered as the rallying cry of freemen, unless the most essential distinctions which define the party be founded in the everlasting disagreement between right and wrong, light and darkness, God and the devil. Henceforth let the rallying cry of patriots and of freemen be—GOD AND LIBERTY. If any care more for their favorite faction than for their country or their souls, then let them take their stand at once in the serried ranks of the legions of darkness, and march under the black banner of Slavery in undisguised hostility to Freedom and God. It is too late to plead excuses or exceptions in partial justification of the existing system of oppression. That would do better, if the perpetrators of the wrong showed any signs of ceasing or desiring to cease from its continuance. But they do not. However often we may hear supporters of the system deploring its existence and wishing themselves rid of it altogether, and however sincere some may be in the use of such expressions; still, the ruling spirit of Slavery, such as it has declared itself to be in the national councils for forty years, such as now defines its character before this nation and before the world, is one of propagandism and of active aggression upon Liberty. Its supporters, so far from taking measures to secure its extinction, are continually extending its domain, and increasing its power. They are fast breaking down every barrier, which hitherto hemmed it in within prescribed boundaries.

They are assaulting the strong holds of Freedom itself, with all their forces, and with charge after charge. In such a state of things we go to the ballot box, we send men to Legislatures and Congresses, not to make or to re-establish compromises with Slavery. We have had too much of them already. We make it a distinct issue in elections, and we give our representatives the solemn commission to sweep from the national statute book everything which commits the Federal Government directly or indirectly to the debasing and destroying system of Slavery. If we *can* do this, and *will* not, then we do not deserve to be free ourselves. If we *cannot* do it, then we have lost our liberty already. And if any, in alarm, say that the adoption of such measures, by the Free States, would lead to the immediate or ultimate dissolution of the Union, then they are welcome to say so till they are weary of it. The duty of all free-men and friends to their country is clear and unquestionable. And if any one whisper, that I, in saying so, am "*preaching politics*," then he is welcome to say *that* till he is weary. I shall neither deny the charge, nor desist from my solemn purpose to preach what *I* call the Gospel, let the traitors to freedom and the assassins of our bleeding country, whose wickedness is denounced and whose fiendish purposes are defeated by such preaching, call it what they will. When the ministers of God need to go to politicians and demagogues to be instructed in their duties, then the politicians and the preachers may change places; and however the churches might suffer, the government cannot be in worse hands. The preacher of the Gospel who has no word of sym-
pa-

thy for the poor slave in his bondage,—no fearless denunciation of heaven's vengeance upon the perpetrators of wrong in the high places of power,—no public prayer unto the God of nations for the deliverance of his country from the hands of those who would wound her unto death,—that preacher deserves to be classed with those who would sell their country for gold, and exalt the cruel devices of iniquity, when framed into a law, above the commands of God. Supported by the sermons and by the silence of such preachers, the reckless leaders of faction and the hired apologists for successful villany, could easily shelter the most atrocious crimes under the forms of legislation, and secure a universal acceptance for the maxim that the *majority*, not less than the monarch, "*can do no wrong.*" When the pulpits of our country lend themselves to the maintenance of such principles, the land itself will be polluted with every form of wickedness in high places and in low, and the avenging judgments of the Almighty will not long be delayed.